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Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY SCHAUFELE AND AF/C BUCHANAN

E.O. 11652: GDS
ATAGS: PFOR, OVIP (BONGO, OMAR), GB
SUBJ: BONGO PROPOSES VISIT TO US

SUMMARY: BONGO HAS ASKED MAURICE TEMPLESMAN TO ARRANGE PRIVATE VISIT TO US AND CALL ON PRESIDENT CARTER FOR EARLY MARCH. EMBASSY STRONGLY RECOMMENDS POSITIVE RESPONSE FOR SUCH VISIT SOMETIME THIS SPRING. END SUMMARY.

1. IN MEETINGS WITH MAURICE TEMPLESMAN JANUARY 23 AND JANUARY 26, BONGO TWICE MENTIONED HIS DESIRE TO PAY EARLY VISIT TO US IN ORDER MEET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER AND ASKED TEMPLESMAN TO MAKE NECESSARY ARRANGEMENTS.

2. BONGO TOLD TEMPLESMAN THAT HE EXPECTS TO BE IN US NEXT FALL IN ORDER ADDRESS UNGA AS CHAIRMAN OF OAU. HOWEVER, HE CONTINUED, HE WOULD LIKE HIS FIRST CALL ON PRESIDENT CARTER TO BE IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHIEF OF STATE OF GABON, AND ITIS FOR THIS REASON HE WOULD LIKE TO PAY BRIEF VISIT TO US WITHIN NEXT FEW MONTHS. HIS PREFERRED DATE, BONGO TOLD TEMPLESMAN, IS BEGINNING
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OF MARCH, SANDWICHED BETWEEN HIS LATE FEBRUARY SKI VACATION IN FRANCE AND HIS ATTENDANCE AT ARAB-AFRICAN SUMMIT IN CAIRO MARCH 6-10.

3. TEMPLESMAN POINTED OUT TO BONGO PROBLEMS LIKELY TO BE EOCOUNTERED IN ATTEMPTING TO ARRANGE VISIT ON RELATIVELY SHORT NOTICE AT TIME WHEN NEW ADMINISTRATION

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STILL SETTLING IN AND SEVERAL OF ITS LEADING MEMBERS
(SUCH AS SECRETARY VANCE) PLANNING TRAVEL WITHIN NEXT
FEW WEEKS. HE NEVERTHELESS UNDERTOOK TO EXPLORE THROUGH
AMBASSADOR YOUNG AT USUN AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY SCHAUFELE
IN WASHINGTON POSSIBILITY FOR ARRANGING CALL BY BONGO
ON PRESIDENT CARTER AND TO DETERMINE WHAT DATES WOULD
BE MOST CONVENIENT.

4. COMMENT: BONGO'S INTEREST IN US VISIT WHICH
INCLUDES CALL ON PRESIDENT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE.
HE HAS BEEN ALLUDING FOR PAST COUPLE OF YEARS TO HIS
DESIRE FOR OFFICIAL INVITATION, BUT NOW SEEMS WILLING
TO SETTLE EVEN FOR BRIEF CALL IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH
RELATIONSHIP WITH NEW AMERICAN PRESIDENT BEFORE HE
ATTTAINS OAU CHAIRMANSHIP. HIS DESIRE FOR SUCH GET-
ACQUANTED CALL HAS BEEN HEIGHTENED BY TWO SIGNED NOTES
RECEIVED FROM PRESIDENT CARTER (IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF
CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE AND NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS) WHICH
BONGO HAS INTERPRETED AS EVIDENCE OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S
INTEREST IN AFRICA AND READINESS TO ESTABLISH PERSONAL
RELATIONSHIPS WITH SELECTED AFRICAN LEADERS.

5. SO LONG AS VISIT CAN BE SET BEFORE OAU SUMMIT,
PRECISE TIMING PROBABLY NOT VERY IMPORTANT TO BONGO.
WHILE EARLY MARCH OFFERS HIM CONVENIENCE OF BEING ABLE
TO SANDWICH VISIT IN BETWEEN OTHER STOPS ABROAD
SEPARATE BRIEF TRIP TO US LATER IN SPRING (PROBABLY IN
CONJUNCTION WITH OTHER TRAVEL) WOULD PRESUMABLY BE EQUALLY
ACCEPTABLE. AROUND EASTER VACATION MIGHT BE PARTICULARLY
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APPROPRIATE, AS BONGO HAS BEEN TALKING ABOUT SENDING HIS
CHILDREN TO STAY WITH TEMPLESMANS FOR A WEEK OR TWO AND
COULD USE THIS AS EXCUSE FOR PRIVATE VISIT TO US.

6. AS FOR TOPICS TO BE INCLUDED ON AGENDA, TEMPLESMAN
SUGGESTED TO BONGO AT MY URGING THAT INITIAL CALL BE
ESSENTIALLY COURTESY VISIT, LIMITED TO DISCUSSION OF BROAD
AFRICAN ISSUES WITHOUT ANY ATTEMPT TO RAISE GABON'S
DESIDERATA ON SUCH MATTERS AS ARMS, INVESTMENTS OR
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE. TEMPLESMAN REPORTS THAT BONGO TOOK
THIS COUNSEL WELL, SO THAT ANY CALL ON PRESIDENT WOULD
HOPEFULLY FOLLOW RESTRAINED SCENARIO.

7. ASSUMING SUITABLE DATE CAN BE FOUND WHICH WOULD
PERMIT BONGO TO PAY CREDIBLY PRIVATE VISIT TO US (AND THUS
NOT AROUSE UNDUE EXPECTATIONS AT HOME), STRONGLY
RECOMMEND WE RESPOND AFFIRMATIVELY TO HIS REQUEST FOR
CALL ON PRESIDENT CARTER. AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT IN
PROPOSING ON SEVRAL OCCASIONS THAT BONGO BE INVITED TO

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US, HE IS ONE OF MOST FUNDAMENTALLY PRO-WESTERN CHIEFS OF STATE IN AFRICA AND MAN WHO WANTS TO HELP US. US INVESTMENTS AND FMS PROGRAM GIVE EVIDENCE OF ICREASINGLY CLOSE TIES, BRIEF MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IS LOGICAL NEXT STEP, AND WOULD SET STATE FOR MORE FORMAL BONGO VISIT TO US NEXT FALL AS OAU CHAIRMAN.STEIGMAN

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